

First Presbyterian Church
101 Plymouth Avenue South
Rochester
Monroe County
New York

HABS No. NY-5652

HABS
NY,
28-ROCH,
26-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5652

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NY,

28-ROCH, 26-

Location: 101 Plymouth Avenue South, southwest corner of
Plymouth Avenue South and Spring Street, Rochester,
Monroe County, New York

Present Owner
and Occupant: The First Presbyterian Society of Rochester

Present Use: Church and parish hall

Statement of
Significance: The strong profile of the First Presbyterian Church
designed by Rochester's leading architect of the late
nineteenth century, A. J. Warner, in the modified
Gothic Revival (ecclesiastical) style was a landmark
in downtown Rochester. Originally supported by an
affluent congregation the church is now located in
a changing neighborhood. Although still maintaining
a congregation, the church has become a center for
neighborhood and community groups.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1871-2. The church was dedicated
June 23, 1872.
2. Architect: Andrew Jackson Warner. Warner was also the
architect of the Powers Building (HABS No. NY-5649) and
the Rochester Free Academy (HABS No. NY-5656). Warner's
practice was continued to the twentieth century by his
son J. Foster Warner.
3. Original and subsequent owners: "Lot 142 ... a parcel
being 63 feet on both South Plymouth Street and Spring
Alley and running from South Plymouth Street (then Sophia
Street) to Spring Alley ..."

1870 Deed, July 1, 1870, Book 238, p. 64.

From: Whiting Wadsworth and Mary A., his wife.

To: The First Presbyterian Society of Rochester.

For: \$7,600.00.

"Lot 143 ... a parcel being north of lot 142, 3 rods wide
(on South Plymouth and Spring Alley) and running from
South Plymouth to Spring Alley along Spring Street ... "

1870 Deed, July 1, 1870, Book 238, p. 66.
From: John Mogridge and Ellen, his wife.
To: The First Presbyterian Society of Rochester.
For: \$9,000.00.

It is these two parcels on which the present building stands.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Contractor: William H. Gorsline. The original contract costs are as follows: structure without spire, windows, furnishings, \$60,000.00; stone spire, \$10,000.00; organ, pews, furniture, carpets, \$15,000.00. (from Charles M. Robinson, First Church Chronicles 1815-1915, Centennial History of the First Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York, 1915.)
5. Original plans: None known.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1939 the entire interior was restored and redecorated under the supervision of John Wenrich, local artist and architectural delineator.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

This particular structure is the third church for Rochester's oldest congregation, organized in 1815. The previous structure, a massive stone building, was destroyed by fire in 1869. The architect A. J. Warner not only received the commission for the new church, but also was the designer of the Rochester City Hall which was built on the site of the burned structure.

C. Sources of information:

1. Old views: An etching was published in McIntosh, History of Monroe County, 1877, plate XIV.
2. Bibliography:
 - a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deeds. Office of Monroe County Clerk.
 - b. Secondary sources:

Hotchkin, Rev. James H. A History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York and of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Presbyterian Church in that Section. New York: M. W. Dodd, 1848.

McIntosh, Prof. W. H. History of Monroe County, New York. Philadelphia, Everts, Ensign and Everts, 1877.

McKelvey, R. Rochester. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.

Robinson, Charles Mulford. First Church Chronicles 1815-1915, Centennial History of the First Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York. Rochester: Craftsman Press, 1915.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Sept. 10, 1939.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated: Church records, Rochester Public Library local history files, papers and plans of Andrew Jackson Warner.

Prepared by Kevin Patrick Harrington
Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in
Western New York
November 29, 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The stone, modified English Gothic Revival church towers over a downtown section of Rochester which has undergone recent urban renewal.
2. Condition of fabric: The structure is in excellent repair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately sixty-two feet or three bays by eighty-nine feet or seven bays; eighteen foot square tower at the northeast corner; rectangular chapel, thirty-one feet by sixty-eight feet adjoining the west wall; three bay; two-and-one-half story social hall, attached at the southwest corner.
2. Foundations: The elevated and slightly dressed Albion sandstone foundation is topped with a molded Medina stone drip course.
3. Wall construction: The slightly dressed red Albion sandstone walls are finished with Medina stone trim.

4. Structural system: The masonry walls are load bearing. Interior open wood trusses support the roof of the auditorium.
5. Chimneys: There are three capped ashlar chimneys set on the north-south ridge of the chapel.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The slightly recessed center entrance is framed by paired stone colonnettes which support a deeply molded pointed stone arch. The double wood doors have glass panels containing leaded Gothic tracery. The entrances to the south side aisle, the north tower, the chapel, and the social hall are similarly treated, but smaller in scale.
 - b. Windows: The large elaborately traced two-sectioned window to the east is set in an arched stone banded recess. Each bay is marked by a lancet window. Some are heavily leaded and deeply colored, depicting various religious scenes. Others are leaded in geometric patterns with tinted glass. A Tiffany memorial window depicting John the Baptist was installed in 1930. The chapel windows are similarly treated but include the use of opaline glass. The social hall is fitted with arched windows containing rectangular leaded casements. There is a large rose window located in the east gable of this hall.
7. Roof: The intersecting three-quarter pitched gable roofs are covered with light green, tan and red slate shingles worked in a diamond pattern. There is a continuous wrought iron ridge ornament. The eaves are finished with copper gutters with copper downspouts. Each bay is delineated by a triangular dormer which is fitted with a trefoil leaded window. The square stone tower is composed of four levels marked by stepped pier buttresses, stone banding, and a variety of small windows. The upper level or bell level is finished with paired lancet openings filled with wood tracery and louvres. The octagonal stone spire which tapers to a stone finial and a copper weather vane is set on a corbeled base supported by brackets.
8. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: All doors leading to the church and chapel are approached by projecting stone stairs which are fitted with simple iron railings.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The nave with center aisle and flanking side aisles can be reached from the two east entrances and the north tower entrance. Access to the social hall to the south and the chapel vestibule to the north is provided by doors flanking the sanctuary. A cantilevered choir and organ loft supported by fluted cast iron columns is located at the east end. A basement, which can be reached from north and south exterior stairs, provides space for mechanical equipment, storage, and meeting and craft rooms. The chapel, with a raised platform to the south, can be entered from the north vestibule. The east entrance to the social hall provides access to church offices and the kitchen. The second floor contains school and meeting rooms.
2. Stairways: A spiral staircase in the narthex leads to the organ and choir loft and continues into the bell tower and spire.
3. Flooring: There is a tile floor in the narthex. Generally, the floors are carpeted.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are painted plaster. The walls are finished with a black walnut wainscoting of vertical beaded boards topped by an ornamental frieze. All lancet windows in the side aisles are finished with an applied molding which serves as a window cap. The side aisles are separated from the nave by six molded and pointed arches which are supported by octagonal columns. Each column is finished with a row of rounded leaves in high relief. The open gable roof is fitted with braced trusses which are decorated with a pierced quatrefoil at the ridge. The exterior dormers penetrate the pitched ceiling as pointed arched openings, thus providing light as from a clerestory.
5. Doorways and doors: The auditorium is fitted with paneled and strapped black walnut doors set in molded black walnut doorways.
6. Special decorative features: A large arched blind window in the west wall of the sanctuary is fitted with a seven foot high black walnut wainscot composed of columns supporting a blind arcade of trefoil arches. This is topped by an arched, elaborately traced two-sectioned, four paneled pre-cast plaster unit which

frames an elaborate golded mosaic depicting two saints flanked by intricately worked arabesques.

7. Hardware: Interior entrance doors are fitted with brass filigree knobs and decorative plates and hinges.
8. Lighting: Bronze or brass framed glass cylinders are suspended on chains from the trusses, two per bay.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church and social hall face east toward the Civic Center Plaza and pedestrian park which is located on the east side of Plymouth Street South. A church parking lot is located to the south of the social hall. An expressway to the south separates this complex from an historic area.
2. Historic landscape design: None.

Prepared by George O. Gray
Society For the Preservation of Landmarks in Western
New York
July, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project of twenty-six selections of historical and architecturally significant Rochester structures was undertaken in 1966, by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc., Mrs. Patrick Harrington, Executive Director, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, James C. Massey, Chief. The project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Senior Historian. Architectural and historical descriptions were contributed by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc. General photographic documentation was undertaken by Hans Padel, Senior Engineer, Graflex, on a contractual basis with the Historic American Buildings Survey. The final documentation and editing was done by Susan R. Slade in 1978, for transmittal to the Library of Congress and the impending publication of the Historic American Buildings Survey New York State catalogue.